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The Significance of Qualitative Research – Arts-based Research in Special Needs Education and Music Therapy

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One of the functions of art is understanding an individual and his or her potential. Art provides an individual with proper conditions and gives new opportunities to function regardless of one's age and disability. The purpose of this article is to get the reader acquainted with the significance of qualitative research especially in the context of arts-based research in special needs education and music therapy. In theoretical part, the authoress will attempt to answer the question of what benefits this research method brings and why it is useful.

What is to be described at the beginning quite extensively is the situation of research in special education and music therapy as a scientific discipline. This presentation will smoothly lead the reader to the essence of article, i.e. the arts-based research method. The definitions of arts-based research will be presented together with differences resulting from defining the notions connected with art. Examples will also be provided of research based on art resulting from the combination of two disciplines such as special needs education and music therapy. Moreover, the authoress will demonstrate her own research based on art with the application of music which emphasizes the significance of changes that occur within the music therapy process. Finally, the arguments which emphasize the significance of arts-based research will be mentioned.

KEY WORDS: arts-based research; music therapy; special needs education

Introduction

The term 'research' describes a studious inquiry or acquisition of new knowledge in a thorough and detailed manner.¹ Research is a planned investigation, aimed at discovering or obtaining a new perspective of a given issue. In turn, it contributes to expanding or changing existing assumptions of theoretical or practical knowledge.² Barbara Wheeler points out that conducting research leads to discovering something new, confirming existing knowledge or changing the way we perceive what we already know.³ In this article I would like to focus on the importance of qualitative research, specifically arts-based research (primarily music-based one) in the context of special needs education and music therapy. I would like to define what this type of research really is and to present examples of other researchers' studies as well as my own ones, within two disciplines, i.e. music therapy and special needs education. Despite the differences and ways of interaction, these two disciplines are very closely related due to the subject of interest, which is a human being, his/her capabilities, resources, but also difficulties or weaknesses. It is this common area that I would like to focus on.

Both disciplines are based on the same principles that are worth mentioning: 1. **personalisation** - special needs education and music therapy seek to protect personal dignity and identity; together they create a humanist culture focused on the individual and the relationship; 2. **early diagnosis and normalisation of life** - they create optimal conditions for development, sensitising people from the immediate environment to create attitudes of functioning of people with disabilities; 3. **responsibility** - they emphasise the shared responsibility of society for the private and public sphere of people

¹ Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, G.C. Merriam, Springfield 2002, p. 992.

² K. Bruscia, *The boundaries of music therapy research*, [in:] *Music Therapy Research: Quantitative and qualitative perspectives*, ed. B. Wheeler, Barcelona Publishers, Gilsum 1995, p. 21.

³ B. Wheeler, *Badania w dziedzinie muzykoterapii (Research in the Field of Music Therapy)*, [in:] *Podstawy muzykoterapii (Introduction to Music Therapy)*, ed. K. Stachyra, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie, Lublin 2012, p. 243.

with disabilities; they do not marginalise the individual, but, according to the interactive model, show that disability lies in the relationship between people, not in the individual; 4. **subsidiarity** - the principle of individual learning and maturation of the individual; providing holistic support; 5. **broadening autonomy** - gaining independence, recognition of subjectivity and autonomy of individuals with disabilities; 6. **individualisation** - adaptation of therapeutic attitudes and activities to the category of a given disorder and the nature of people; relying on the individual's potential, possibilities and ways of developing them in various situations; 7. **multi-specialist approach towards the individual and cooperation with the family**.⁴

The differences and similarities between special needs education and music therapy are illustrated in the figure below, which primarily indicates the aforementioned area of interest of two disciplines and their principles.

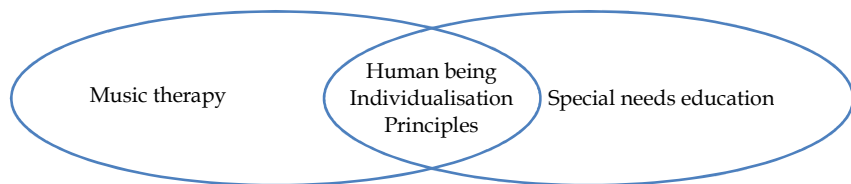


Figure 1. Common areas of special needs education and music therapy. Own study

***Arts-based research* in music therapy and special needs education**

Katarzyna Krasoń and Ludwika Konieczna-Nowak emphasise that art and pedagogy strive for empathy accumulated on the path

⁴ W. Dykcik, *Zakres i przedmiot zainteresowań pedagogiki specjalnej* (*Special Pedagogy – The Scope and Subject of Interest*), [in:] *Pedagogika specjalna* (*Special Pedagogy*), ed. W. Dykcik Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2012, pp. 75–79.

of experience, bringing subjectified material,⁵ emphasising the importance of qualitative and individualising research, which in its nature is based on the uniqueness of the studied element. According to Krzysztof Konarzewski, each research object is unique and exceptional in qualitative research.⁶ Qualitative research in special education and music therapy focuses on understanding the psychological features of the individual and puts great emphasis on the details appearing in the therapeutic/research process. It is holistic, empirical, descriptive and empathic, based on the experience of the individual.⁷ Krasoń and Konieczna-Nowak also define it as interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary, intersubjective, and eclectic (especially research in music therapy).⁸ This interdisciplinary research in music therapy is moving away from one-sided methodological thought in favour of research fusion, data mixing, and diversity of approaches that allow for a broader research perspective.⁹ Intersubjectivity, in turn, is based on obtaining subjective material, or experiences acquired during the process both from a therapy participant and researcher.¹⁰

Research conducted in special needs education is used for theoretical, practical, exploratory, verification and diagnostic pur-

⁵ K. Krasoń, L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Sztuka, terapia, poznanie. W stronę podejścia indywidualizującego w badaniach muzykoterapeutycznych* (Art, Therapy, Cognition. Towards an Individual Approach in the Research on Music Therapy), PWN, Warszawa 2016, p. 113.

⁶ K. Konarzewski, *Jak uprawiać badania oświatowe. Metodologia praktyczna* (How to Do Research in Education. Practical Methodology), Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 2000, p. 77.

⁷ E. Ruud, *Music Therapy, Improvisation, Communication and Culture*, Barcelona Publishers, Gilsun 1998, pp. 57–62 (the Polish based on the authoress's translation from English).

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ J.W. Creswell, *Projektowanie badań naukowych. Metody jakościowe, ilościowe i mieszane* (Designing Scientific Research. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2013, p. 221.

¹⁰ K. Krasoń, L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Sztuka, terapia, poznanie. W stronę podejścia indywidualizującego w badaniach muzykoterapeutycznych* (Art, Therapy, Cognition. Towards an Individual Approach in the Research on Music Therapy), op. cit., pp. 113–114.

poses.¹¹ Adam Stankowski and Natalia Stankowska also emphasise other functions of science that have a utilitarian dimension in special needs education - diagnostic, prognostic, instrumental-technical and humanistic functions.¹² It is worth stressing that special education as an academic discipline in Poland has a much richer range of trends, concepts and paradigms¹³ than music therapy. The latter is a young field that is dynamically developing in clinical and research terms. Brynjulf Stige distinguishes five areas related to music therapy: (1) **folk music therapy** - these are all activities related to music and support through musical activities; (2) **music therapy as a discipline** - an area of knowledge that covers the history, tradition of music therapy and its discourses; includes the research area; (3) **music therapy as a profession** - these are activities aimed at implementing appropriate standards qualifying music therapy as a profession; (4) **music therapy as a practice** - it is a process of creating music aimed at restoring the health and well-being of an individual; (5) **unprofessional use of music** that involves the use of music to improve health, but not by qualified music therapists. According to Stige, these five areas relate to music therapy as a whole. The researcher also suggests extending this term to many other directions to emphasise the diversity of this discipline.¹⁴ Both music therapy and special needs education are internally diverse disciplines, which is reflected in research conducted in these fields.¹⁵

¹¹ S. Juszczuk, *Badania jakościowe w naukach społecznych. Szkice Metodologiczne (Qualitative Research in Social Sciences. Methodological Outline)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2013, p. 40.

¹² A. Stankowski, N. Stankowska, *Pedagogika społeczna i pedagogika specjalna wobec edukacji osób niepełnosprawnych (Social Pedagogy and Special Pedagogy in Relation to Education of People with Disabilities)*, "Chowanna" 2012, no. 2, pp. 325-333.

¹³ A. Krause, *Teoretyczne i empiryczne problemy pedagogiki specjalnej. Zarys obszarów badawczych ("Theoretical and empirical problems of special pedagogy. Outline of research areas")*, *Niepełnosprawność. Półrocznik naukowy*, 2009, no. 1, pp. 9-24.

¹⁴ K. Aigen, *The Study of Music Therapy*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New York-London 2014, p. 11.

¹⁵ B. Wheeler, *Badania w dziedzinie muzykoterapii (Research in the Field of Music Therapy)*, [in:] *Podstawy muzykoterapii*, ed. K. Stachyra, op. cit., p. 241.

When discussing these studies, it is necessary to mention Evidence Based Practice in the context of music therapy. Evidence Based Practice (EBP) is the integration of the best available research and clinical experience (...), containing the overall characteristics of patients, taking into account their social, cultural context, values and preferences and needs. EBP is based on the assumption that all services should be effective, have solid scientific foundations and should be provided in the most effective manner (...) and the aim is to show that the procedures adopted are safe, effective and profitable. EBP (initially used in the field of medicine and psychiatry), has also been adapted to psychology, psychotherapy or music therapy today. However, there are some doubts related to EBP, which are mentioned by Andera Gilroy (not just about favouring an experiment as the research method, e.g. Randomized Control Trial), concerning the belief that confirmation of evidence by medical activities (i.e. only through quantitative research methods), may lead to inhibition of research in the field of music therapy or art therapy.¹⁶ In addition, due to the qualitative nature of the activities and the multiplicity of elements included in the music therapy process, such research (based only on quantitative data) would be impossible. Hence the author emphasises that individual practices and services related to art should develop their own interpretation of the evidence so that they can use the uniqueness of the field.¹⁷

Therefore, four levels of scientific evidence in art therapy and music therapy were suggested, arranged in a hierarchical manner:

- Level 1 "a" - results from at least one RCT (randomized controlled trial) or another controlled experimental study (or a quasi-experiment);
- Level 1 "b" - results of other studies, including qualitative and case studies;
- Level 2 - research results and an academic research paper;

¹⁶ A. Gilroy, *Arteterapia – badania i praktyka (Art Therapy, Research and Evidence Based Practice)*, AHE, Łódź 2009, pp. 21–22.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

- Level 3 - opinions of experts in the field;
- Level 4 - practitioners' opinions.¹⁸

The above interpretation of the evidence indicates the importance of qualitative research, hence I would like to choose four research methods that I will characterize briefly: **qualitative case studies, mixed-methods case studies, action research and artistic case study**.

Qualitative case studies, i.e. interpretative case studies are descriptive studies that do not require the introduction of a specific impact. They contain interpretations of observed events, data comes from various sources. In music therapy and special needs education, the therapist as a researcher is especially important as somebody who is involved in both the research and therapeutic/educational process.¹⁹ Another method is a mixed-methods case study. It is the fusion of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Mixed-methods projects using and implementing many strategies for mixing data, e.g. through triangulation (following here Uwo Flick²⁰ or John Creswell²¹).

The eclecticism of many methods and techniques means that we receive an overall assessment of the solution to the research problem, which can be further refined by another study. The third method is action research, which through its in-depth analysis and participation tends to improve the functioning of the practice. It directly refers to the existing problems of the individual/institution. The fourth method is **arts-based research**, to which I will devote more attention in the next subsection.

¹⁸ K. Krasoń, L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Sztuka, terapia, poznanie. W stronę podejścia indywidualizującego w badaniach muzykoterapeutycznych* (Art, Therapy, Cognition. Towards an Individual Approach in the Research on Music Therapy), op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁹ A. Gilroy, *Arteterapia – badania i praktyka* (Art Therapy, Research and Evidence Based Practice), op. cit., p. 158.

²⁰ U. Flick, *Projektowanie badania jakościowego* (Designing Qualitative Research), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2013, p. 84.

²¹ J. Creswell, *Projektowanie badań naukowych. Metody...* (Designing of scientific research. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods), op. cit., p. 221.

Arts-based research

*Arts-based research*²² is a kind of research which applies tools, procedures, and materials originating in arts. This research belongs to the field of qualitative research. The studies can refer to persons, groups, institution and describe musical, fine arts or dance activities.²³ *Arts-based research* is rooted in arts, but the researcher does not have to be an artist or author of the work. The expression by means of arts is a fundamental method of understanding and testing experience of persons involved in the study.²⁴ The *arts-based research* can be given a variety of names: *artistic inquiry*²⁵, *aesthetically based research*²⁶, *critical arts-based research*²⁷ or *arts based inquiry*.²⁸ There are also differences in defining certain terms, such as

- a) *artistic research*: the work of arts and the text refer to the concept and theories related to it; here the artist is a researcher. This kind of research requires the use of artistic methods while accumulating, analysing, and interpreting the data; the creative process is involved; the artistic values of the researcher are revealed here²⁹;

²² S. McNiff, *Art as research: Opportunities and challenges*. IL: intellect, Chicago 2013.

²³ A. Gilroy, *Arteterapia – badania i praktyka (Art Therapy, Research and Evidence Based Practice)*, op. cit., p. 134.

²⁴ K. Krasoń, L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Sztuka, terapia, poznanie. W stronę podejścia indywidualizującego w badaniach muzykoterapeutycznych (Art, Therapy, Cognition. Towards an Individual Approach in the Research on Music Therapy)*, op. cit., pp. 41.

²⁵ G. Knowles, A. Cole (eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples and issues*, CA: Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2008.

²⁶ L. Bresler, *Toward connectedness: Aesthetically based research*, "Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research in Art Education", 2006, no. 48(1), pp. 52–69.

²⁷ S. Finley, *An Introduction to critical arts-based research: Demonstrating methodologies and practice of a radical ethical aesthetic*, "Cultural Studies-Critical Methodologies" 2014, no. 14(6), pp. 531–532.

²⁸ D. Ausitn, M. Forinash, *Arts-based Research*, [in:] *Music therapy research*, ed. B.L. Wheeler, 2nd Edition, Barcelona Publishers, Gilsum 2005.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 459.

- b) *practice-led research* – here the artist is a researcher; the work and documentation of the process is a result of the research work.³⁰

The same author indicates three aspects of art having an impact on its relation with the research process.

- Art is self-reflective; hence, the creative act is a research act.
- **Art is a form of communication, and artistic activity becomes a research tool.**
- It is a kind of commodity where the work is the only object of research.³¹

The art plays an important role in both music therapy and special needs education. It functions as a form of communication, which, as if a non-verbal channel, allows achieving therapeutic goals, related to supporting the social, emotional, cognitive, motor or communicative sphere. The art has in itself a therapeutic use and its proper application / handling (by a qualified person, such as a certified art therapist or music therapist) can lead to reaching the goals postulated by special education or music therapy.³² The art, or more specifically its creation, usage and application, affects the patient / participant by means of changes in the functioning of the individual occurring during the creative / therapeutic process. The art with a therapeutic dimension was referred to by Edith Kramer, who emphasised that “the art in its nature is therapeutic” and can lead to positive changes in human being.³³ The appearing valorisa-

³⁰ A. Teikmanis, *Typologies of Research*, [in:] *Handbook for Artistic Research Education*, eds. M. Wilson, S. van Ruiter, Share Network, Amsterdam, Dublin, Gothenburg 2013, p. 164.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² B. Wheeler, *Music Therapy as a Profession*, [in:] *Music Therapy Handbook*, ed. B.L. Wheeler, The Guildford Press, New York, London 2017, pp. 9–10.

³³ K. Krasoń, L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Sztuka, terapia, poznanie. W stronę podejścia indywidualizującego w badaniach muzykoterapeutycznych* (*Art, Therapy, Cognition. Towards an Individual Approach in the Research on Music Therapy*), op. cit., p. 18, after: W. Szulc (ed.), *Arteterapia jako dyscyplina akademicka w krajach europejskich* (*Art Therapy as an Academic Discipline in European Countries*), Uniwersytet Wrocławski w ECARTE, Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2010, p. 21.

tion of the work of arts, or hermeneutic analysis, is an interpretation of the work of art as a form of communication of the participant with the world. The process of creation and the therapeutic process are described and analysed in terms of relation taking place between the participant and the therapist (phenomenological analysis).³⁴ The researcher – within the *arts-based research* – wants to rediscover the meaning of artistic work by people marginalised socially, culturally and politically, as well as persons within the therapeutic process.³⁵ The researcher wants to understand the creative process rooted in art / music therapy.³⁶ The researcher wants to understand life experience of persons participating in the creative process, within their social and cultural context.³⁷ Moreover, the researcher wants to understand himself/herself within the social, cultural or historical context.³⁸

According to Diane Austin and Michele Forinash, the arts-based research is based on the necessity to implement aesthetic activities. According to the authors, the very implementation of music in the research, e.g. in the form of improvisation, does not imply its aesthetic and artistic values.³⁹ Alison Ledger and Jane Edwards, in

³⁴ K. Krasoń, L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Sztuka, terapia, poznanie. W stronę podejścia indywidualizującego w badaniach muzykoterapeutycznych* (Art, Therapy, Cognition. Towards an Individual Approach in the Research on Music Therapy), op. cit., p. 116.

³⁵ S. Gilbertson, *Improvisation and meaning*, "International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being" 2013, no. 8(1), pp. 1–10; M. Viega, *Performing "Rising from the Ashes": Arts-based research results from the Study "Loving me and my butterfly wings": An analysis of hop-hop songs written by adolescents in music therapy, "Music Therapy Perspectives"* 2016, No. 34(1), pp. 46–47.

³⁶ A.R. Schenstead, *The timelessness of arts-based research: Looking back upon a heuristic self-study and the arts-based reflexivity data analysis method*, "Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy" 2012, no. 12(1)/ <<https://voices.no/index.php/voices/article/view/2035/1779>>.

³⁷ D. Austin, *Revisiting Grace Street: a retrospective account on the creation of an arts-based research study of Alcoholics Anonymous*, "Music Therapy Perspectives" 2016, no. 34(1)/ miv046, DOI: 10.1093/mtp/miv046.

³⁸ A.R. Schenstead, *The timelessness of arts-based research: Looking back upon a heuristic self-study and the arts-based reflexivity data analysis method*, op. cit.

³⁹ D. Austin, M. Forinash, *Arts-Based Research*, op. cit., pp. 458–463.

turn, underline that the defining of the arts-based research cannot be subjected to unequivocal rules, since it is extremely heterogeneous. Defining such research and categorising it strictly in the art is impossible, and even unnecessary.⁴⁰

The examples of studies applying the *arts-based research* method or its elements, are research explorations and simultaneously therapeutic processes exhibited by the following researchers.

Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins (1971, 1977), the creators of the Nordoff-Robbins, are first of them.⁴¹ The authors in their research and clinical work indicated that music therapy based on improvised songs, creating short musical “music theatres”, can bring about the development of communicative and social possibilities of children and youth with special needs.⁴² The techniques of music therapy they worked out with handicapped children in mind (and later for the young and adults) helped to develop their creative potential and “enhance their mental functions through positive experience and beneficial social experience”.⁴³ The authors described the kinds of musical creations of handicapped children in interaction with the therapist – starting with the game with full rhythmic freedom reaching a chaotic and creative game. Based on many observations and thorough microanalysis of therapeutic sessions (all musical behaviours), they prepared their own form of assessment of the level of participation of the child in its developing musical relation with the therapist.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ A. Ledger, J. Edwards, *Arts-based research practices in music therapy research*, “The Arts in Psychotherapy” 2011, no. 38, pp. 312–317.

⁴¹ P. Nordoff, C. Robbins, *Creative Music Therapy. A Guide to Fostering Clinical Musicianship*, Barcelona Publishers, Gilsum 2008.

⁴² P. Nordoff, C. Robbins C. *Music Therapy in Special Education*, The John Day Company, New York 1971.

⁴³ P. Nordoff, C. Robbins, *Terapia muzyką w pracy z dziećmi niepełnosprawnymi. Historia, metoda i praktyka* (*Music Therapy in Working with Disabled Children. History, Method and Practice*), Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2008, p. 118.

⁴⁴ L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Wprowadzenie do muzykoterapii* (*Introduction to Music Therapy*), Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2013, p. 53.

Carol Robbins and Clive Robbins (1991) with a group of persons with slight and moderate intellectual disability, created, prepared and actively participated in the musical performance which was presented to a great audience. Artistic activities included in the creation of the musical improved the self-esteem of persons participating in the musical project and decreased their hyperacusis.⁴⁵

Leon Miller and Gael Orsmond (1994, 1995), similarly to Nordoff and Robbins, applied improvisation in their research work, which brought about re-education of negative behaviours, such as: irritation, crying, stereotypical thinking, hyperactivity of people with slight and moderate disability. The authors used a variety of musical elements – complex sound productions based on the presence of many rhythmic, harmonic or melodic patterns.⁴⁶

In her research project, Satomi Kondo (2003) described the process of music therapy performed with a person dying in an intensive care unit. The researcher used the music created live and images which helped the patient to express emotions and experiences and allowed them to share their experience, and most of all supported them in their difficult passage.⁴⁷

Jacqueline Robarts (2003, 2006), a long-term researcher and music therapist working in a psychodynamic field, described the process of music therapy with a sexually abused girl. The process was based primarily on creating improvised songs and recording them. These techniques helped to express the hidden, subconscious sense

⁴⁵ C.M. Robbins, C. Robbins, *Self-communication in Creative music therapy*, [in:] *Case studies in music therapy*, ed. K. Brusica, Barcelona Publishers, Gilsum 1991, pp. 55–72.

⁴⁶ L.K. Miller, G. Orsmond, *Assessing structure in the musical explorations of children with disabilities*, "Journal of Music Therapy" 1994, no. 31(4), pp. 248–265; L.K. Miller, G. Orsmond, *Correlates of musical improvisation in children with disabilities*. "Journal of Music Therapy" 1995, no. 32(1), pp. 152–168.

⁴⁷ S. Kondo, *Special moments: Attending to a dying person during the music therapy session in the intensive care unit*, Niepublikowana praca magisterska, Simon Fraser University, Ottawa, Kanada, 2003, after: M. Viega, M. Forinash, *Arts-based research*, [in:] *Music Therapy Research*, ed. B. Wheeler, K. Murphy, Third Edition, Barcelona Publishers, Dallas 2016, pp. 495.

of sadness and solitude of the girl and allowed her to develop more self-esteem as a person and future woman.⁴⁸

Michael Viega (2013, 2016), in turn, described the process of creating hip-hop songs by teenagers with bad childhood memories (related to violence and abuse). The creative process based on writing lyrics and composing music led to increased consciousness of emotions experienced by participants.⁴⁹

Michael Viega (2013, 2016) applied music and poetry in the music therapy process of the AA group. The music they created – songs with therapeutic texts – became the basis for a musical (*Grace Street*), in which the therapy participants were actors.⁵⁰

Analysis of own research

With reference to the significance of *arts-based research* in music therapy and special needs education, I would like to present my own research, which places music within the human centre of interest and emphasises the significance of changes taking place during the music therapy processes. The two discussed studies are different in terms of methodology – the first study is based on the qualitative research and uses artistic case study, whereas the other study refers to mixed methodology.

The first study (2016–2019 – typical for *arts-based research*) concerned the creation of own songs by three young people with the so-called high-functioning autism and presenting them at a concert to an audience.⁵¹ The process of creating own songs (lyrics, melody, the kind of accompaniment) and experiences related to the concert,

⁴⁸ J. Robarts, *Music Therapy with Sexually Abused Children*, “Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry” 2006, no. 11(2), pp. 249–269

⁴⁹ M. Viega, *Performing “Rising from the Ashes”: Arts-based research results from the Study “Loving me and my butterfly wings”: An analysis of hop-hop songs written by adolescents in music therapy*, “Music Therapy Perspectives” 2016, no. 34(1), pp. 46–47.

⁵⁰ D. Austin, *Revisiting Grace Street: a retrospective account on the creation of an arts-based research study of Alcoholics Anonymous*, op. cit.

⁵¹ At present, the study is in the course of publication, 2019.

such as stress, the sense of responsibility and unity, became for them a path of social and emotional development. These experiences became an area for the development of many emotions, an attempt at identifying them and the way to share them with others – in a group of acquaintances or with strangers during the concert. The experience of creation presented them with a totally new way of expression – creative, in a safe therapeutic area, where jointly, as a group, they strived to understand one another. As Bill Nason points out (2016), most of the development occurs in relations with others (...); for neurotypical children it is part of a natural process; persons with an autism spectrum disorder cannot deal with it”.⁵² Therefore music therapy, non-directing impact, could show them strategies of development of social or emotional skills. It provided space for sharing and showing their creativity to people from outside the autism spectrum.

The other study was performed in the years 2013–2017⁵³ – “The significance of music therapy techniques in the support of an autistic child’s development” is a study which applied elements of *arts-based research*, based primarily on the phenomenological and hermeneutic paradigm. The aim of this study was to check the functioning of eight children with an autism spectrum during a music therapy process. Music therapy techniques were subjected to a detailed analysis (improvisation/creation, recreation and listening) on selected development areas of autistic children. The above procedure was based on mixed methodology, the main strategy of which was the parallel immersion.⁵⁴ In terms of the dominating – qualita-

⁵² B. Nason, *Porozmawiajmy o autyzmie (Let’s Talk about Autism)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2016, pp. 281–282.

⁵³ Praca doktorska „Znaczenie technik muzykoterapeutycznych we wsparciu rozwoju dziecka z autyzmem”, obroniona w 2018 roku na Uniwersytecie Śląskim, Wydział Pedagogiki i Psychologii w Katowicach.

⁵⁴ This strategy is characterised by one phase of qualitative and quantitative data accumulation. It includes the main method, on which the project is based, and secondary, which has an auxiliary function; the secondary method (here – quantitative) is immersed (embedded) in the dominating method, in this case the qualitative

tive – method, I applied a detailed description of the music therapy process, video recordings, in-depth qualitative analysis (qualitative analysis of musical and non-musical behaviours), the analysis of texts and documents. In terms of the immersion (quantitative) method, I used measurements (before commencing the therapy and after it) based on categorised observation by means of a tool using objective referees and quantitative data analysis.

Phenomenological aspects of this research project were visible in drawing up detailed session reports, subjected to categorisation. The identified categories were desired musical, undesired musical, relational desired musical, and relational undesired musical. These categories referred to the key occurrences and musical behaviours taking place during music therapy sessions. Each musical behaviour was attributed with a non-musical behaviour, which constituted communication as well as social and emotional subcategory (categories of relational desired and undesired musical behaviours) and cognitive and motor (categories of desired and undesired musical behaviours). All these activities had a specific code; hence, the given musical behaviour matched a defined non-musical behaviour. The above attempt to categorise musical behaviours and create a music therapy tool as desired and undesired behaviours is the only form of this kind of categorisation in the field of music therapy and autism in Poland. As a result, apart from the description of the child's behaviour, I described phenomenological characteristic of the relation taking place between the therapist and the participant, which is the result of systematic qualitative observation.⁵⁵

Results of my research are based on observed changes resulting from music therapy activities. Their objective research is impossible, since in the music therapy process the music experiences permeate

one – J. Creswell, *Projektowanie badań naukowych. Metody...* (Designing of scientific research...), op. cit., pp. 226–231.

⁵⁵ The doctoral thesis titled *The Significance of Music Therapy Techniques in Supporting the Development of Children with Autism*, defended in 2018 at the University of Silesia, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology in Katowice, pp. 136–137.

and their effects modify one another. However, qualitative results prove that improvised activities can affect and improve social and emotional sphere of the autistic child, whereas the activities based on re-creative activities shape the cognitive and motor sphere.⁵⁶

The meaning of *arts-based research* in special needs education and music therapy

Taking into consideration the above examples of studies related to the art of music – their variety in terms of research participants their age, social and cultural context, it is worthwhile to answer the thesis of this article – what is the meaning of *arts-based research* in special needs education and music therapy? The benefits of this method and why they should be used.

The art/music is an alternative form of communication with the world – they can be another method of gaining information about human beings, phenomena, and experience. Thanks to music, we can reach the individual – the personality, perception of oneself and of the world. Moreover, we can reach the problem of functioning people participating in the study and find out about the changes – social, emotional, communicative – which appeared during the creative/therapeutic process. The very possibility of experiencing the creative, meaningful process, can provide the sense of self-fulfilment, self-development and a broadly understood expression. The music can also constitute the tool to improve specific development spheres of persons with problems and limitations. It can break barriers and create communicative opportunities. It can be a space connecting people despite differences – social, cultural, and economic factors of the level of functioning or the scope of abilities. As Shaun McNiff pointed out, “experience gained from artistic activity of the patient can be a starting point for the patient’s cognition and im-

⁵⁶ Ibidem, pp. 303–304.

provement".⁵⁷ Using art in the studies can be a form of cognition (diagnosis) of the given person and the method of verification of therapeutic activities based on the art and their efficiency.

However, the most important aspect of art in the research and therapeutic process are the supporting activities, providing opportunities of change and development of the individual involved in the process. The art/music strives to understand and thoroughly recognise the individual, as well as perceive their potential which may be developed by means of specific activities. Individuals are supported and their mental functions are enhanced by means of positive observations and beneficial social experiences.⁵⁸ The art provides the individual with adequate conditions and opportunities of functioning regardless of age and kind of disability, disorder or difficulty. It does not only improve and correct, but most of all it stimulates and activates so that the individual could feel subjective satisfaction, happiness and fulfilment.

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⁵⁷ S. McNiff, *Preference*, [in:] *Art-Based Research*, Fifth impression, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London-Philadelphia, 2006, p. 13, after: K. Krasoń, L. Konieczna-Nowak, *Sztuka, terapia, poznanie. W stronę podejścia indywidualizującego w badaniach muzykoterapeutycznych* (Art, Therapy, Cognition. Towards an Individual Approach in the Research on Music Therapy), op. cit., p. 80.

⁵⁸ P. Nordoff, C. Robbins, *Terapia muzyką w pracy z dziećmi niepełnosprawnymi...* (Music Therapy in Working with Disabled Children...), op. cit., p. 118.

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